

Dear Madam and Sirs of the Appropriations Committee,

My Name is Willie Williams. I work at the May Institute based in Manchester, CT. I work in a group home in Plainville Connecticut. I live in Hartford. In Plainville I give direct support to men with developmental disabilities so they can live independently in the community. Because of their behavioral challenges it makes it difficult to live in the community without the supports me and my co-workers provide.

I have worked at the May for 11 and a half years. It has been a long struggle, especially with the low wages I make. After 11 and half years I still only make \$13.43. When I started at the May I made \$11.92 an hour. Because of my low wages I haven't been able to afford advancing my own education and I haven't been able to support my family well. We have had to move from place to place trying to find a safe community for my family. It has been difficult. This has also meant high transportation costs because of my commute and the cost of gas is so high.

I am always chasing my paycheck. This means on average I am working, if I am lucky, 65 or more hours a week to support my family. I used to work more hours per week to make ends meet when I had a second job. But then the May Institute changed my hours of work forcing me to quit that second job. It has been a lot harder to meet my family's needs because of this. But I had no choice, the May was my full time job. I haven't been able to find a second job since because my new schedule conflicts. And now my job is threatened with potential future cuts.

My employer has told me they have had no increase in funding from the state of Connecticut in the last 5 years and in December they said they the one-time funds for my services got cut. This is a cut that support my specific type of work. This lack of funding has meant I didn't get a raise for 6 straight years and my standard of living has declined.

This lack of funding has also affected my clients. With my consumer I used to be allowed to take him out for walks in the park and other public recreational outings in the community. But now with cuts to funding, funding which once supported his 2 to 1 staffing ratio, we can only take him on van rides. I am worried with further cuts he won't even be able to get out of the group home other than to go to work. This isn't the type of service he deserves. He has the right to get out into the world.

This is just one individual at my agency but I know from working at other group homes and talking to my co-workers that this is not an isolated story.

So I am asking for your assistance. Please restore some security to my livelihood and to the stability of my consumer's ability to go out into the community. The consumers need to live

in dignity and have clean and upgraded surroundings as well, even as simple things as replacing old and worn out furniture.

Pleas support funding for DDS group home funded agencies like mine. We are part of the private sector Safety Net. We need your help. Thank you for taking the time to hear me.